A note on consumption of processed foods by bonnet macaques in the Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu, India

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Bonnet Macaque (*Macaca radiata*) is a primate species endemic to southern India that is found in forest habitats as well as urban settings - road ways, farm fields, villages and cities (Veeramani et al. 2019). They are of medium size, distinguished by a cap or bonnet of long hair, arranged in a whorl and parted clearly, and a very long tail that is longer than its body (Menon 2014). Bonnet Macaques are omnivores and their diet include floral and fruit buds, leaves, petioles, pith, stems, tendrils, roots, flowers, fruits, tubers, seeds, leaf-galls of different plants, insects, spiders, bird eggs and lizards (Sinha 2001; Veeramani et al. 2019).

Bonnet Macaques are known to feed on cooked food fed to them by religious Indians (Menon 2014). Bonnet Macaques, living around human habitations, are often provisioned by the local people and such troops occasionally also scavenge from garbage dumps (Sinha 2001). Sinha (2001) also mentioned that tourists visiting a number of wildlife sanctuaries in southern India feed these monkeys with human food. Likewise, Gajbe (2018) noted that Bonnet Macaques get fruits, nuts, baked food and cooked food from local people and tourists.

Processed foods are made for human consumption, by various procedures, that alters the food from its natural statethrough heating, freezing, drying, milling, canning, mixing, cleaning, peeling, fermenting,

smoking, packaging as well as adding salt, sugar, fat or other food additives (Weaver et al. 2014; Popkin 2019). Here, I report field observations and photographic records of Bonnet Macaques feeding on processed food in Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu, India.

During opportunistic field observations of Bonnet Macaques in April 2019 I observed and photographed Bonnet Macaques at Dolphin's Nose viewpoint (11.34°N, 76.81°E) and Pykara Lake (11.43°N, 76.59°E) in the Nilgiris district. Both of these locations are well-known tourist spots.

On 15 April 2019, between 12:35 h and 13:30 h, I noted some Bonnet Macaques feeding on packaged potato chips, biscuits and packaged fruit juices at Dolphin's Nose viewpoint. One individual macaque, which

was feeding on biscuits, had swollen cheek pouches. Another individual was licking a torn fruit juice container, which it had collected from an open dustbin. A third individual was observed eating from a packetof potato chips, holding the plastic packet with one hand, and the potato chips with the other. On 16 April 2019, at 11:56 h, beside Pykara Lake, a Bonnet Macaque was seen collecting packaged chocolate milkshakes from an open dustbin, and drinking the contents.

The long term effect of regular intake of processed foods by wild simians has not been studied or quantified much, less so in the case of Bonnet Macaques. There are chances that they may ingest parts the non-degradable packing material, mostly plastics, also along with the food. This is definitely bound to affect their digestive system. Tourists should be made aware of the dire consequences of provisioning food to free ranging wild animals.

Photographs

Figure 1: A Bonnet Macaque feeding on packaged potato chips. Dolphin's Nose viewpoint, Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu. 15 April 2019. © Tanmoy Bhowmick

Figure 2: A Bonnet Macaque with swollen cheek pouch, feeding on biscuit. Dolphin's Nose viewpoint, Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu. 15 April 2019. © Tanmoy Bhowmick

Figure 3: A Bonnet Macaque feeding on packaged chocolate milkshake. Beside Pykara lake, Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu. 16 April 2019. © Tanmoy Bhowmick

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